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ARTICLE

Logics of stratified identity management in world politics

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Abstract

The importance of concerns about status in world politics has rarely been as evident as it is today. Yet our understanding of how status dynamics influence politics and foreign policy remains limited. Dominant approaches draw on insights from social psychology about individual attitudes and behavior, but scale these up to build accounts of states as unitary or anthropomorphic actors. This results in serious theoretical problems and analytical blind spots. In this article, I offer a new framework – still rooted in social psychological insights about intergroup status dynamics – that addresses these problems. I recast the fundamental question from one about how states react to status dissatisfaction to one about how individuals – with different psychological profiles, different interests, and different positions within the national community – react to anxiety about the status of the state with they identify. I develop four broad logics that inform responses to national status dissatisfaction: identification change, emulation, transformation, and rejection. These logics subsume familiar arguments about how states seek status, but they also accommodate additional variation and explanatory possibilities. They thus constitute a more flexible framework that is better suited than existing alternatives to understand the full variety of ways in which status dynamics may influence world politics.

The importance of concerns about status in world politics has rarely been as evident as it is today. Anxiety about past, present, or future national status is implicated in ongoing Chinese expansion, recent Russian aggression, the rise of American right-wing populism, Great Britain's impending withdrawal from the European Union, and North Korea's nuclear proliferation.[1] Deciphering contemporary international politics is impossible without understanding how status dynamics influence the way states are put together and how they interact.

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[1] Freedman (2016), Clunan (2009, 2014), Mutz (2018), Kenny and Pearce (2018), Beaumont (2017), and Goddard and Nexon (2018).

Research on status in international relations has advanced significantly over the past 15 years but remains limited in ways that pose obstacles to the ability of policy makers, scholars, and observers to make sense of the various pathways through which concerns about a state's position in a hierarchy can influence politics, foreign policy, and international politics.[2] Most frameworks for analyzing status in world politics rely on insights developed by psychologists and social psychologists to explain the attitudes and behavior of individual human beings confronted with inadequate or threatened status. They typically scale these up to develop accounts of state responses to status anxiety or dissatisfaction. This approach to theory-building raises important questions about the validity of the claims that emerge from it. It has also hampered the development of scholarship on status in two ways: by circumscribing the range of explanations that analysts have developed to account for variation in responses to status anxiety and by imposing artificial and unnecessary limits on the kinds of phenomena that status dynamics can be invoked to help explain.

In this article, I propose a revised framework for analyzing the role of status dynamics in world politics. The framework that I develop remains rooted in the same psychological and social psychological insights that are at the core of prominent existing approaches. However, I do not use these to form the basis for a model in which states appear as unitary or anthropomorphic actors. Instead, I develop a framework built to understand differences in the various ways in which *individuals* can respond to dissatisfaction with or anxiety about the international status of the state with which they identify. This move leads to a substantially more flexible theoretical apparatus, which subsumes insights derived from existing frameworks while incorporating phenomena and explanatory possibilities that prominent models miss.

I argue that individuals can respond to anxiety about the status of the state with which they identify in one of four very broad ways that differ most fundamentally in terms of the *logics* through which they address the problem. First, individuals can alter their portfolio of social identifications. For instance, an individual might respond to dissatisfaction with the state's status by weakening the importance of the national social identification relative to an alternative social identification (an ethnic group, for instance) within his or her social identity. Second, individuals can promote collective efforts to improve the state's position along symbolically significant consensually valued dimensions of comparison. Third, individuals can promote collective efforts to transform via reinterpretation or renegotiation some component of the interstate comparative situation as a way of alleviating the status deficit or threat that the state faces. Fourth, individuals can promote collective efforts to reject the norms, rules, and institutions that constitute and are productive of the interstate status hierarchy as a means of expressing resentment and signaling the illegitimacy of the status quo.

The article proceeds in three sections. First, I briefly introduce the concept of status, highlight its importance in international relations, and review significant existing theoretical frameworks for understanding the consequences of national status dissatisfaction or anxiety. Second, I introduce a new framework built on a shift from thinking about variation in the way that states respond to status dissatisfaction to thinking about variation in the way that individuals respond to

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[2]For reviews, see Dafoe *et al.* (2014) and Paul *et al.* (2014).

national status dissatisfaction. This section also introduces the four distinct logics that I contend animate these different responses. Third, I sketch the outlines of a new research agenda based on this framework by (1) discussing means of empirically distinguishing between the pursuit or promotion of responses to status dissatisfaction or anxiety rooted in different logics and (2) proposing potential explanations for variation in responses to national status dissatisfaction or anxiety among individuals with different psychological profiles, interests, and positions within national political and social institutions.

Status and status seeking

Status refers to the position that an actor occupies within a social hierarchy – often understood as membership in an elite club or as a socially recognized and accepted ranking within a community. In international politics, elite clubs and rankings are composed of states: the 'great power' club is the most obvious, but there are others as well: the 'West', the OECD, and the G7, all constitute stratified positions within a global social hierarchy.

Achieving status involves two steps. First, an actor has to acquire the markers that distinguish those eligible for a particular stratified position from those ineligible. For example, the characteristics that make states eligible for 'great power' status have varied over time but have typically included some measure of power and influence, along with civilizational and institutional characteristics.[3]

But status does not automatically follow the acquisition of the appropriate markers. The second requirement is that an actor be *recognized* by relevant others as occupying a particular position. Achieving the markers of great power status does not lead automatically to treatment consistent with holding great power status. To actually *occupy* a stratified position within a hierarchy, states must be *recognized* by being granted the rights and privileges that go along with the desired status.[4]

Interest in status in IR has grown steadily over the past two decades. The most common means of analyzing international status politics is to scale up models initially developed to explain the ways in which status dynamics influence the attitudes and behavior of *human beings*. Propositions and findings about how *people* respond to status anxiety (often rooted in social psychological research) are transformed into propositions about the status-seeking *strategies* that *states* pursue and about variation in strategic choice.

For instance, Renshon's work on the link between status dissatisfaction and interstate conflict is rooted in psychological and social psychological propositions about *individual* drives for status and their behavioral implications. Indeed, the experimental work that provides support for Renshon's account manipulates subjects' anxiety about their own *personal* status. This micro-foundational evidence contributes to propositions about the behavior of *states* via a claim that individual leaders experience (and respond to) anxiety about national status in the same way that they experience (and respond to) anxiety about personal status. The result is a

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[3]See Volgy *et al.* (2014) and Neumann (2014) for discussions of the markers of great power status in world politics.

[4]On accommodation, see Paul (2016) and Ward (Forthcoming).

straightforward and general proposition that status dissatisfaction leads to conflict initiation as a means of improving position.[5]

A second prominent framework uses insights from social identity theory (SIT) about how intergroup status dynamics influence *individual* attitudes and behavior to derive a taxonomy of strategies by which *states* can seek status. Larson and Shevchenko argue that dissatisfied states can seek status by (1) adopting the 'norms', 'institutions, values, or ideology', 'behavior', and 'practices' of elite club members – a peaceful strategy called 'social mobility;' (2) seeking a 'favorable position on a different ranking system', perhaps by 'reevaluating a negative trait as positive or identifying a new criterion for evaluation on which the group ranks highly' – an innovative strategy called 'social creativity;' and (3) trying to 'equal or outdo' a higher ranked state 'in the area on which its claim to superior status rests' (which in IR, they say, is 'usually geopolitical power') – a conflictual strategy called 'social competition'.[6] They link variation in strategic choice to variation in the characteristics of international status hierarchies. Larson and Shevchenko's translation of SIT has been deeply influential for subsequent work on status in IR.[7]

Both of these frameworks have been valuable in the early development of the modern research program on status in IR. They also share characteristics that produce important blind spots. Both accounts at least implicitly treat states as *unitary* actors; both conceptualize the consequences of status dynamics exclusively in terms of variation in foreign policy and conceptualize variation in foreign policy as a function of the psychological mechanisms and strategic calculations of leaders who react *homogenously* to changes in environmental stimuli. In short, though these accounts are rooted in psychological insights about the importance of status and identification for human beings, and the ways in which individuals respond to changes in or dissatisfaction with status, they are both, in the last instance, *structural*: they explain variation in outcomes (in state behavior) as a function of changes in the international environment and in the state's position within an international hierarchy.

A structural approach to theorizing about international status politics has obvious advantages – chief among them parsimony, which has made these kinds of models easy to adopt and adapt for a variety of empirical purposes. Yet this approach is also problematic for at least three reasons.

First, there are serious questions about whether the insights about how status dynamics matter for individual attitudes and behavior that form the basis for claims about state behavior have been – or can be – scaled up and translated without fundamentally altering their meaning. For instance, Renshon's model is rooted in experimental work on individual responses to threatened *personal* status, but this is not obviously directly comparable to threatened *national* status – the former involves an *individual identity*, while the latter involves a *collective identification*, which introduces additional potential complexity.[8] Similarly, Larson and Shevchenko's translation of SIT actually departs fairly substantially from the *social psychological* version of SIT. The latter framework distinguishes between *individual*

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[5]Renshon (2015, 2016, 2017).

[6]Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 71, 72, 75) and Larson and Shevchenko (2014, Kindle location 1108, 1126).

[7]See Ward (2017a) for an overview of recent work that has adopted or been influenced this framework.

[8]See Lebow (2016, 1–3) for a discussion of this important distinction.

and *collective* responses to unsatisfactory in-group status, while the former translation ignores this distinction. The version of SIT that has become predominant in IR is unlike the social psychological version on which its conceptual categories and behavioral propositions are based in significant but unacknowledged ways.[9]

Second, the predominance of structural approaches limits our ability to explain variation in the ways in which status dynamics influence foreign policy. For Renshon, status dissatisfaction emerges from a disjuncture between a state's capabilities and a state's position in an international or regional hierarchy – a structural condition – and produces pressure to initiate conflict.[10] Though psychological mechanisms play an important role in this story, they play *the same role* within the heads of all leaders.[11] Thus, we are limited to telling stories that rely on variation in the state's *position* in the world to explain outcomes. Larson and Shevchenko's translation of SIT is similarly limited. The key variable in their model is the character of the international hierarchy: variation between mobility, competition, and creativity depends on variation in the permeability, stability, and legitimacy of status clubs or rankings. In both approaches, individual and domestic political or institutional differences play no role in driving differences in the way status dynamics influence outcomes.

Third, predominant structural approaches are blind to important *forms of variation* or outcomes that might plausibly have some relation to status dynamics. For instance, there is little doubt that Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy – which has been characterized especially by the *rejection* of central elements of international order – is partially a response to anxiety about the United States' status in the world. But it is difficult to make sense of this as a form of conflict initiation aimed at enhancing American status, or as some instantiation of mobility, creativity, or competition. Moreover, approaches that treat states as unitary are blind to phenomena that might be linked to status but that cannot be depicted as some kind of state strategy or behavior. It is impossible, for instance, to think about the potential domestic political consequences or transnational effects of changes in national status from within Larson and Shevchenko's framework – even though status dynamics likely *do* have such consequences, with important implications for foreign policy.

A new framework

Like existing approaches to the analysis of status in world politics, my framework is rooted in the widely supported contention that individuals care about the status of groups with which they identify and that states are social groups with which individuals identify and from which they derive self-esteem. This common starting point relies on the uncontroversial assumption that national identity categories – American, Italian, Canadian, etc. – matter to individual *social identities* just as athletic team or university or professional or religious affiliations do. Part of the

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[9]See Ward (2017a) for a more thorough discussion of this problem.

[10]Renshon (2016, 2017).

[11]Renshon (2017, 96) does note that social dominance orientation (an individual-level variable) influences the degree to which people care about status, but he argues that this variable is primarily interesting because *most* leaders will have high levels of SDO, which means that they will be, on average, more sensitive to status than nonleaders.

way that individuals understand who they are is as members of a series of in-groups, and state affiliation constitutes one of these.[12]

This implies that the state's *status* in the world – the *stratified* component of its identity – matters to individuals in part because it influences how they feel about themselves. When the state has high status relative to relevant out-groups, this is likely to contribute to feelings of pride – in the same way that a victorious per-formance by a college or professional sports team with which one identifies gen-erates positive feelings. Low or inadequate status, on the other hand, generates feelings of shame or anger.[13]

Status anxiety or status dissatisfaction is thus an uncomfortable condition that generates pressure for a response or reaction in order to rectify the situation.[14] In the context of international politics, status anxiety or dissatisfaction is most commonly understood as a pathology common to *rising powers*. Rising powers may advance rapidly along significant dimensions of comparison – like military capabilities – and as a result appear to deserve increasing special rights, privileges, or deference in their interactions with other states. But if these indicators of *recognition* do not adjust rapidly enough, it may contribute to the perception that the state is being disrespected or is undervalued. This can create psychological and political pressure to alleviate the situation, even though rising powers may have *strategic* incentives to downplay their status ambitions.[15]

The dynamics of rising material capabilities are not the only possible source of status anxiety or status dissatisfaction in world politics. The experience of *relative decline* may also produce consternation about the state's status in the world.[16] So may identity narratives of *lost greatness*, which can contribute to a sense that the state with which one identifies is chronically underappreciated by relevant others.[17]

Wherever it comes from, the feeling that the state's status is inadequate, inse-cure, or under threat constitutes an aversive condition that may prompt some sort of response. Prior work on status in IR has deployed these insights as a foundation on which to build accounts of how or why *states* (that is, governments or leaders) care about and seek status. By contrast, I use this foundation to build a framework to understand the ways in which *individuals* (with different psychological profiles, interests, and positions within a national community and institutional architecture) might respond to anxiety about or dissatisfaction with the state's status. Instead of scaling up a set of social psychological insights to understand how anthro-pomorphic or unitary states seek status, I use the same insights to understand variation in individual reactions to changes in, threats to, or anxiety about the status of the state. These responses may contribute in a number of ways to var-iation in foreign policy. But by remaining at the individual level, the framework accommodates greater descriptive and explanatory flexibility compared to accounts

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[12]See Lebow (2016, Ch. 1), for a recent treatment of the relation between social identity and national identification.

[13]Ibid., 3–22.

[14]To be clear, this does not imply that status dissatisfaction is the *only* source of anxiety about national identity. Stratification is only one element of identity, and other elements are likely to require management as well.

[15]On the latter point, see Sullivan (2015), Burges (2008), Pu (2017), and Miller (2013).

[16]Onea (2014).

[17]Freedman (2016), Clunan (2009), and Zell and Allicke (2010).

that begin from micro-foundational starting points but use these to make direct claims about state behavior.

The varieties of individual responses to unsatisfactory national status

Social psychological approaches to understanding the dynamics of intergroup status divide responses into two broad categories.[18] The first involves changes in *identification*. Individual social identities are composed of multiple group identifications. Individuals identify as members of a variety of groups – including states, classes, ethnic groups, religious affiliations, and others. Group salience varies across contexts, as does strength of affiliation. For instance, social psychologists working with the 'common in-group model' study the link between the salience of group identification and intergroup discrimination and bias.[19] Making in-groups that individuals share with one another more salient than exclusive identity categories is one way of doing so. A recent application to the politics of national identity shows, for instance, that heightening the salience of the 'American' in-group reduces hostility between partisans of the Republican and Democratic parties.[20]

Social identity theory highlights shifting in-group identification as an important means of managing inadequate in-group status. Change in individual group identification – not in the status of any in-group – is what users of SIT mean when they write about 'mobility'.[21] Mobility occurs when an individual alleviates a condition of inadequate group status by *disidentifying* from the subordinate in-group and *identifying* with a superior in-group.

The other type of response to inadequate group status involves *collective* attempts to *change group status*. The key distinction is that unlike responses that involve changing individual identification, these responses are premised on the *maintenance* of strong ties between the individual and the subordinate in-group. Instead of changing the composition of the individual's social identity, individuals promote changes in the *position or orientation* of a subordinate group relative to relevant out-groups.[22]

The distinction between responses focused on *identification* and responses focused on *changing in-group status* is the most fundamental means of categorizing the various ways in which people might manage anxiety about, threats to, or inadequate national status. However, there are important differences *within* these categories as well. The rest of this section further develops these distinctions in order to fully specify the range of ways in which individuals might respond to national status dissatisfaction.

Logics of identification change

Changes in identification can insulate an individual from the negative social psychological consequences of low, inadequate, or threatened national status in two broad ways: first, by *weakening* the individual's attachment to the state, thereby

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[18]See, for instance, Tajfel (1978a, 46, 53), Tajfel (1978b, 64, 89, 93), Tajfel and Turner (1979, 43), Hogg and Abrams (1988, 55), Brown and Ross (1982, 157), and Blanz *et al.* (1998).

[19]Gaertner *et al.* (1993).

[20]Levendusky (2018).

[21]For comprehensive overviews, see Tajfel and Turner (1979, 35), Hogg and Abrams (1988, 55), and Blanz *et al.* (1998).

[22]Tajfel and Turner (1979, 35), Hogg and Abrams (1988, 55), and Blanz *et al.* (1998).

reducing the degree to which the individual's self-esteem depends on the state's status and, second, by – to some extent – replacing the national identity category within the individual's social identity with some other significant in-group that contributes more positively to the individual's self-conception.

Identification dynamics can function at different levels of aggregation, with different consequences for politics and foreign policy. The most obvious way in which dissatisfaction with national status may prompt a change in identification is by weakening ties to the state relative to *subnational* identity categories. This is the inverse of the nation-building dynamic that Sambanis, Skaperdas, and Wohlforth link to state status *gains*: they argue that victory in war increases national status, which incentivizes individuals to identify more strongly with the state than with subnational identity categories. Reversing this logic implies that *reductions* in the state's status produce incentives for individuals to identify more *weakly* with the state and more *strongly* with subnational groups.

Examples of this dynamic are easy to identify. The loss of Spain's last American possessions after the 'Disaster' of 1898 was felt as a devastating reduction in Spanish status in some quarters. It constituted for many 'a crisis of both identity and legitimacy: identity because their own self-esteem was bound up with that of the nation; legitimacy because those to whom they had, willingly or unwillingly, entrusted the interests of the nation had signally failed to defend those interests'.[23] One consequence was that some subnational identity groups were strengthened. For instance, the Disaster 'reinforced the feeling among many Catalans that they had a separate national identity and a different historical destiny and that these were incompatible with those of Castile'.[24] The loss of status that accompanied the erosion of the British Empire after World War II had a similar effect on the strength and coherence of the 'British' national identity. David McCrone notes that 'the loss of empire eroded [the British] identity at home and abroad', with a variety of consequences.[25] For one thing, this likely contributed to the increased salience of sub-British and especially *racial* identity categories: Enoch Powell's 'hostility to immigration from the Black Commonwealth', for instance, flowed from an '"ethnic" definition of nationality', and 'rested on his recognition that England lay at the core, and that in many respects "Britain" had come to an end'.[26] It is also likely that the loss of the British Empire contributed in some manner to the increasing salience of Scottish identity in the decades after the end of World War II.[27] Concerns about the implications of lost status on the strength of national identity and the prospects for national disintegration are also central to understanding Charles de Gaulle's desire to return France to the ranks of the 'world powers' during the 1960s.[28] There is even evidence that recurrent anxiety about relative national decline has contributed to partisan animosity in the United States over the past three decades.[29] Thus, one novel insight that emerges from this framework is that anxiety about or dissatisfaction with national status may trigger

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[23]Balfour (1997, 68).

[24]Ibid., 137.

[25]McCrone (1997, 592).

[26]Ibid., 593–94.

[27]Nielsen and Ward (2015). See also Nairn (1977) and Seton-Watson (1980).

[28]Cerny (1980, 4–6).

[29]Ward (2018).

or exacerbate processes that reduce the strength of national identity categories and hence unravel or disintegrate political coherence inside the state.

Identification dynamics can also operate at trans- or supra-national levels, in which case they may have very different consequences. It is possible, for instance, that an individual could compensate for inadequate or unsatisfying national status by identifying more strongly with an identity category constituted at a higher level of aggregation than the state. Social psychologists refer to this sort of process as 'recategorization'. A classic example comes from post–Cold War Germany. East Germans dealt with negative social comparisons vis-à-vis higher status West Germans by tending to identify more strongly simply as 'Germans'.[30]

The Anglo-American power transition during the late 19th and early 20th centuries provides another example of recategorization at work. Although the rise of the United States as a continental hegemon presented a serious threat to British status, it did not generate intense Anglo-American rivalry.[31] Part of the reason was that some British elites dealt with this development by identifying more broadly with the Anglo-Saxon ethno-linguistic family and celebrating its apparently glorious future.[32] Cecil Spring-Rice, for instance, was a long-time British diplomat and became ambassador to the United States during World War I. He was resigned to the inevitability of British decline but took comfort in the fact that the United States was 'the real fortress of our race'.[33] According to Anderson, 'the contemplation of America's growing strength gave [Spring-Rice] much satisfaction'.[34] Spring-Rice was not alone: other British leaders made similar references to 'race patriotism', as did some American leaders.[35] This likely had real consequences for Anglo-American relations: Anderson suggests that 'the most powerful incentive among the British populace toward support of American imperialism was the assumption of Anglo-American racial affinity'.[36] The upshot was that the expansion of American power and influence – in important ways a source of consternation for British leaders and elites concerned about their place in the world – became a source of pride.[37]

Both versions of this logic involve shifts in individual identification as responses to national status dissatisfaction. Both have firm foundations in insights from the same social psychological frameworks that have informed existing analyses of status in IR. They also have potentially significant implications for both domestic politics and foreign policy. Yet identification dynamics linked to changes in or anxiety about national status remain largely ignored or at least unstudied by analysts interested in understanding the role of status in international politics.[38]

Logics of in-group positional change

The other category of responses to national status dissatisfaction involves promoting or working collectively toward some sort of *change* in the state's position in

[30]Mummendey *et al.* (1999, 230).
[31]See Bell (2007, 239).
[32]On Anglo-Saxonism, see Vucetic (2011).
[33]Quoted in Gwynn (1929, vol. 1, 407).
[34]Anderson (1981, 93).
[35]Ibid., 85; Campbell (1957, 10).
[36]Anderson (1981, 126).
[37]See Ward (2017b, chapter 6) for a full discussion of this case.
[38]A notable exception is Sambanis *et al.*'s (2015) work on war and nation-building.

or orientation toward the international social hierarchy. These logics are *collective*: in SIT's terms, they aim at achieving some sort of *social change* for the *entire* in-group. Responses in this category are still usefully understood as phenomena that vary at the *individual* level. Different individuals, situated differently within the national community, with different psychological profiles and different interests, may prefer and promote different approaches to redressing a national status deficit. Responses remain *collective* so long as they are premised on the maintenance of a strong affiliation with the state as an identity category, and so long as they are meant to work by changing the state's position in or orientation toward the international status hierarchy.

I draw on existing distinctions familiar from social psychological work on intergroup status dynamics to identify three collective logics of stratified identity management: *emulation* of in-groups with higher standing; *transformation* of some element of the intergroup comparative situation; and *rejection* of status quo norms, rules, institutions, and political arrangements.

Emulation

Emulation refers to any effort to improve the group's status by acquiring symbolically significant resources that are consensually valued and thought necessary for the achievement of higher status. In short, the logic of emulation involves an effort undertaken by or on behalf of an in-group to climb an existing status 'ladder' – to acquire admirable characteristics or competently perform consensually valued practices in order to convince relevant others to recognize that the group belongs to a higher status position than it currently occupies (or to defend an existing – but insecure – position).

Notably, this conceptualization says nothing about the *substance* of moves informed by the logic of emulation. That is driven by the nature of what Nexon and Neumann (following Bourdieu) call *capital* in the particular *social field* within which advanced position is sought.[39] The kinds of characteristics and performances that are consensually valued – that are thought to be status enhancing – vary across different status communities, different hierarchies, and over time.

In some contexts, for example, symbols of military and economic power are understood as the most relevant forms of status-producing capital. Nexon and Neumann suggest that this is typically true of status communities that occupy the *top* of the international hierarchy – in other words, to establish a claim to 'great power' status, or 'world power' status, or to compete for the position of hegemon, a state will need to acquire symbolically significant resources and competently perform symbolically significant practices that indicate a certain level of advancement in economic and military fields.[40] Still, the specific form that symbolically significant practices and resources take is constructed and varies over time. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, salient symbols of 'world power' status were battleships and colonies. Thus, elites in Wilhelmine Germany and Imperial Japan who promoted efforts to gain entry into the 'world power' club did so by advocating the construction of large navies and the acquisition of empires.[41]

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[39]Nexon and Neumann (2017).
[40]Ibid., 10–11.
[41]Murray (2010) and Ward (2017b, Chs. 3 and 4).

Over the next several decades, the symbolic significance of empire was reversed, and battleships were replaced by aircraft carriers, space programs, and nuclear weapons as geopolitically significant status symbols.[42]

Other – less violent and conflict prone – resources and performances may also be understood as capital and sought for reasons related to the competition for status. For example, Rhamey and Early argue that Olympic medals increase status, which implies that investing in athletic prowess is a means of competing for position in global or regional hierarchies.[43] Towns argues that practices and institutions related to gender have also been – in various ways – symbolically significant markers of status. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for instance, political institutions that *excluded* women from power signaled civilization and advancement. More recently, political institutions that aim at *inclusion* have become symbolically valuable, and Towns suggests that the incentive to compete for status is a critical part of the explanation for the spread of these institutions around the world.[44] Neumann also argues that even the status community at the top of the global hierarchy – the 'great powers' – has had not just a material and geopolitical basis but also an institutional and cultural component. Competition for status within this community requires not just acquiring symbolically significant military or economic resources (like battleships) or competently performing symbolically significant military or economic practices (like empire building) but also adopting consensually valued political and cultural institutions and practices (like democracy or free markets).[45]

The logic of emulation subsumes a number of important arguments about how states seek (or defend) their status. For instance, Renshon argues that status dissatisfaction leads states to start wars or militarized disputes as a way of publicly demonstrating military capacity. This works because military capacity is a 'valuable attribute or possession' that drives status attribution in international relations.[46] Thus, to the extent that improving and demonstrating military capacity is a strategy for seeking status, it functions via the logic of emulation: by advancing the status-seeker's position along a consensually valued dimension of comparison in the hope of thereby securing recognition from relevant others. Similarly, Barnhart argues that states whose status is under threat respond by acquiring symbolically significant resources to strengthen the foundation of their position. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, within the 'great power' status community, this involved competitions for colonial territory, since empire was, at the time, a symbol of great power status.[47]

The logic of emulation subsumes *two* of Larson and Shevchenko's status-seeking strategies. *Social competition*, according to Larson and Shevchenko, refers to an attempt by a lower status state to catch or pass a higher status state along the dimensions of comparison that constitute the latter's advantage. Since, according to Larson and Shevchenko, international status hierarchies are typically founded on military and economic power, social competition entails the acquisition of

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[42]Musgrave and Nexon (2018).
[43]Rhamey and Early (2013).
[44]Towns (2010).
[45]Neumann (2014).
[46]Renshon (2017, 58–59).
[47]Barnhart (2016, 391–94).

symbolically significant military and economic resources. On the other hand, *social mobility* refers – in Larson and Shevchenko's translation – to status advancement via the adoption of the practices, norms, and values of higher status states.[48] Though these strategies involve *substantively* different sets of behaviors in Larson and Shevchenko's framework – arms racing, for instance, on the one hand; democratization, for example, on the other – the *logic* by which each is supposed to result in higher status is the same. Both work by advancing the state's position along consensually valued dimensions of comparison in order to convince relevant others to recognize the former's status claims.

Transformation

Logics of transformation function by fundamentally changing the comparative situation in a way that addresses the problem of inadequate, subordinate, or threatened status. It is worth distinguishing between two kinds of transformations.

The first involves altering collective understandings about what constitutes a consensually valued dimension of comparison. If logics of emulation work by having the state climb existing ladders composed of symbolically significant resources and practices, the first form of transformation works by changing the constitution of those ladders. This is what Larson and Shevchenko – following Tajfel and other developers of SIT – refer to as 'social creativity'.[49]

Status ladders can be transformed in different ways. One involves convincing relevant others to treat new dimensions – along which the state is better positioned to excel – as valuable. Scholars have provided numerous examples of this kind of status seeking – including China's promotion of Confucian values and the 'Beijing Consensus' developmental concept abroad, and post–Cold War Russia's attempt to reinterpret its imperial and Orthodox histories as sources of status.[50]

Status ladders can also be transformed by attempting to negotiate the *removal* or weakening of particular admirable characteristics. This phenomenon has been less thoroughly explored. One example comes from Japan's quest for great power status during the early 20th century. By the end of World War I, Japanese elites had become concerned that they might never achieve full equality of status with Western great powers because of racial difference. This fear arose because of the way that Western governments and leaders had behaved and spoken over the previous three decades: the emergence of the discourse of the 'Yellow Peril' played an important role, as did race-based immigration restrictions imposed by the United States and the British Dominions beginning late in the 19th century.[51]

Evidence of racial discrimination made Japanese leaders nervous about participating in the post–World War I institutional order.[52] Foreign Minister Kosai Uchida worried that 'the persistence of narrow racial attitudes among nations creates the possibility that [the League of Nations'] establishment will be disadvantageous to the Empire'.[53] These concerns led Japan's delegation to the Paris Peace Conference to push for the inclusion of a clause in the treaty that would ban

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[48]Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 2014).
[49]Larson and Shevchenko (2003, 2010, 2014).
[50]Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 73, 88), Larson and Shevchenko (2014, 40), and Clunan (2009, 90).
[51]Ward (2017b, Ch. 4).
[52]Burkman (2008, 4).
[53]Quoted in ibid., 50.

racial discrimination, which historians have interpreted as an effort to formally eradicate whiteness as a marker of great power status.[54]

The second type of transformation involves a shift in the state's status *expectations*. Instead of trying to change collective understandings about what constitutes admirable characteristics or consensually valued dimensions of comparison, this approach promotes a lower standard of comparison for the state. Put simply, it acknowledges that predominant expectations about the role the state should play in world politics are unrealistic and that the state should adopt a less lofty 'peer group' or 'status community'.[55] Like emulation and social creativity, this approach addresses status dissatisfaction by reducing the distance (or securing the relation) between the state's *actual status* and the status that individuals that identify with the state think that it should occupy. But while emulation and creativity reduce this distance by improving the state's actual status, this logic – which I call *downward adjustment* – works by changing collective ideas about the status the state should occupy in an international or regional hierarchy.

Though downward adjustment has received little attention from international relations scholars, it is a common phenomenon. History is replete with examples of states that used to but do not anymore make claims to being 'great' or 'world' powers: Sweden, Spain, and Austria are three dramatic examples. These cases suggest that downward adjustment is perhaps uninteresting because it is driven largely by material decline or military defeat; yet the contemporary debate in the UK over whether Great Britain remains a 'great power' implies that the process of downward adjustment is more complicated and worthy of attention.[56]

Rejection

To grasp the nature of the logic of rejection, it is necessary to understand the intimate link between status hierarchies and the rules, principles, and institutions of international order. The rules, principles, and institutions of international order constitute hierarchy in the sense that they establish status categories and their attached rights and privileges. This means that (1) the states at the top of the hierarchy benefit from its rules, institutions, and principles; (2) the rules, institutions, and principles of the order help to preserve the status hierarchy; and (3) the rules, institutions, and principles of the status quo order constitute a tangible manifestation of hierarchy.[57]

The logics of emulation and transformation respond collectively to national status dissatisfaction in ways that largely accept the legitimacy of this broader social order. Emulation seeks to change the acknowledged ranking of states along consensually valued dimensions of comparison but acknowledges the legitimacy of the dimensions that form the basis of those status rankings. This is true even of geopolitically competitive instantiations of emulation – like empire building or arms racing. These forms of emulation still *reproduce* existing status ladders by implicitly ratifying their validity. Social creativity, on the other hand, attempts to reform understandings about what counts as a consensually valued dimension of

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[54]Shimazu (1998, Ch. 2, 112–13) and Burkman (2008).

[55]Tajfel and Turner (1979, 43–44).

[56]For instance, see Kenny and Pearce (2018).

[57]This view is consistent with prominent scholarship on hierarchy and order, including Carr (1946), Bull (1977), Gilpin (1981), and Ikenberry (2001).

comparison but does so by negotiating within a broader context that accepts the need to convince existing high-status actors of the validity of these ideas. Both approaches are, in short, based on the need to secure *recognition* from relevant others that the in-group has successfully improved its status.

Rejection works differently. It does not aim, directly, at convincing existing high-status actors to recognize the state's true value. Instead, it works by attacking the validity and legitimacy of the rules, principles, and institutions that form both the basis and most tangible manifestation of the hierarchy. This can take a variety of forms: it can be violent or nonviolent; it can involve protest or withdrawal from political or social institutions; it can manifest itself in behavior that violates rules, norms, and principles or in drives to secede from a political community. The common element is that rejection manages status dissatisfaction by delegitimating, protesting, or – sometimes – seeking to overthrow the normative and institutional order that constitutes and makes visible the status hierarchy.

There are two concrete reasons that rejection may be attractive as a response to status dissatisfaction. These can be understood as distinct versions of the logic. The simplest is that attacking an international order might eliminate an obstacle to the achievement of some status ambition. If a set of political arrangements seems to have been set up in a way that prevents the satisfaction of an actor's claim to higher status, a revolution of the political order might be attractive. This remains a risky proposition, but if it appears to be the only plausible means of satisfying a demand for change, the risk must be weighted against the apparent certainty of remaining dissatisfied.

In the context of international politics, a demand for this sort of 'revolution' may take the form of a war launched to destroy and reconstitute an international or regional order.[58] A useful example is the way some German elites thought about European conflict during the period just before World War I. Military officer and popular author Friedrich von Bernhardi, for instance, wrote that the continental 'balance of power' system was an impenetrable obstacle to Berlin achieving the 'world power' status to which he – and many others – thought it should aspire.[59] To Bernhardi, there were two solutions: one was to give up the claim to achieving equality of status as a 'world power'. The alternative – which Bernhardi advocated – was to reject and fight to overthrow the European order.[60]

This version of the logic of rejection does not *require* hegemonic war. Nor does it have to be driven by the frustrated ambitions of a rising power. When Charles de Gaulle became president of France in 1959, one of his primary foreign policy objectives involved the restoration of France to what he saw as its rightful place as a world power, rather than as a secondary state in a world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. This concerns' origin lay partially in de Gaulle's own personal belief that 'France had a special right and duty to play the role of a world power simply because it was France', and partly in the belief that the cohesion of the French people required that France fulfill this role.[61] More concretely, the concern with French status was expressed as an orientation of defiance and transgression against the existing Cold War political order, which de Gaulle saw as

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[58]Or what Gilpin (1981) calls a 'hegemonic war'.

[59]Bernhardi (1914a, 136–48).

[60]Bernhardi (1914a, 1914b).

[61]Cerny (1980, 80).

an obstacle to the return of France to world power status. According to Gordon, 'independence was more than anything else the means de Gaulle believed necessary to achieve grandeur: France had to be free enough "to seek her rightful place in the world"'.[62] This explains, at least in part, de Gaulle's skepticism toward and ultimate withdrawal from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – which he saw as the institutionalization of French subordination.[63]

The second way in which rejection might seem to be an effective response to national status dissatisfaction is by satisfying emotional, psychological, and political demands for protest or transgression. Relative deprivation theorists and other social psychologists argue that individuals are more likely to support 'nonnormative' action, protest, and secession when they face unjust obstacles to advancement. Unjust obstacles generate emotions like anger, frustration, and resentment, which may be vented by protesting against the injustice.[64] They can also generate psychological and political incentives to delegitimate the source of the obstacle. If the obstacle is legitimate, this implies that something about the status seeker is deficient; but if the obstacle is illegitimate, then the deficiency lies with the status hierarchy and the order that constitutes it. As Evers writes, a 'rejective transgression' of international norms allows actors to 'embrace their exclusion from international society and imbue it with positive meaning'.[65] Zarakol (2011) similarly describes one means of dealing with 'stigma' as 'claim[ing] to reject the dominant norms of the international system and substitute their own version of "reality"'.[66] And Terman notes that norm violations are sometimes informed by a strategy of *defiance*, which may be a psychologically and politically attractive response to 'symbolic domination' – an 'illegitimate attempt to undermine the target's status, integrity, or interests'.[67]

An example of this type of rejection comes from the final phase of Japan's search for status before the Pacific War. Japan's effort to eliminate whiteness as a status marker failed in Paris after World War I. For the rest of the 1920s, Japanese moderates remained in control of foreign policy and continued to pursue a course that respected the rules and institutions of the new order that had been constructed at Versailles and in Washington. This was becoming controversial, though. A militant group of 'Pan-Asianists' advocated withdrawal from the Western order and the construction of a Japan-centered order in East Asia. Part of their argument was that racial discrimination could not be overcome and that remaining within the Western order was thus both disadvantageous and humiliating. Future Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe decried the 'fawning' attitude of Japanese opinion makers toward Western leaders; influential writer Shumei Okawa complained that Japanese moderates were 'shaming' themselves by continuing to cooperate within the bounds of the Western order; Ikki Kita thought justice demanded that Japan overthrow Western domination.[68]

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[62]Ibid., 18; Brown and Ross (1982, 15–20).

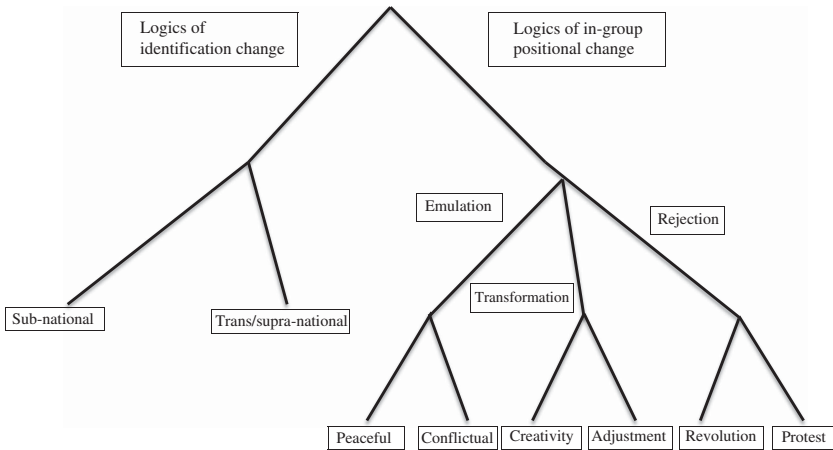[63]Bryant (2000), Cerny (1980, Ch. 8), and Kolodziej (1974, Ch. 3).

[64]See Smith (1999), Devos *et al.* (2003), Grant (2008), Abrams and Grant (2012), and Stekelenburg (2011).

[65]Evers (2017, 789).

[66]Zarakol (2011, Kindle location 2460).

[67]Terman (2017, 5).

[68]On Konoe, see Hotta (2011, 314–17); on Okawa, see Aydin (2007, 113–52), Hotta (2007, 63), and Tankha (2006, 282).

Figure 1. Logics of stratified identity management in international politics.

These views did not influence foreign policy until the early 1930s. But in the wake of the Mukden Incident and the League of Nations' rejection of Japanese claims that the invasion of Manchuria was justified by legitimate security concerns, Japanese moderates came under heavy pressure from militarists to protest Western hypocrisy by withdrawing from the League. They were unable to resist – even though they understood that the move carried with it serious costs – and Tokyo announced its departure from the central institution of the interwar order in March 1933.[69]

Understanding variation in responses to national status dissatisfaction

The four logics of identity management introduced above appear graphically as a branching diagram in Figure 1. They integrate and subsume familiar status-seeking strategies and introduce new kinds of variation in the ways in which individuals may respond to national status dissatisfaction. Overall, they constitute a complete conceptual framework for analyzing the roles that status dynamics play in world politics.

It is worth emphasizing again that these strategies are best understood as responses that may be promoted or pursued by *individuals* within a state facing some sort of status deficit or threat. Some individuals may respond by changing identification; others may promote emulative efforts to improve the state's position; others may promote a new – less ambitious – understanding of the state's proper role in the world; others may promote norm transgression or defiance in order to satisfy the drive to protest the state's subordinate position.

Understanding *outcomes* – that is, how status dynamics influence the state's domestic political institutions or its foreign policy – involves interrogating the ways in which these individual responses interact. Which kinds of responses are most appealing to different kinds of people in different contexts? What kinds of factors influence the relative appeal of, say, rejection vs. downward adjustment or of

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[69]For a full account, see Ward (2013) and Ward (2017b, Ch. 4).

responses aimed at identification change vs. responses aimed at in-group positional change?

Beginning to answer these kinds of questions would constitute a promising foundation for future work on the range of ways in which status dynamics influence world politics. Yet much of this variation is *invisible* from the perspectives of prevailing approaches. In some cases, this is because predominant frameworks model states as unitary actors. For instance, there has been almost no attention to the possibility that status dynamics influence the relative strength of national identification – with a variety of substantive consequences for politics and foreign policy – even though this is a central implication of the social psychological work on which IR status literature is founded.[70] This is clearly in part because so much of this research effectively anthropomorphizes states. In other cases, the explanation for blind spots is less obvious. For example, the downward adjustment of in-group status ambitions is clearly categorized as a type of social creativity in Tajfel and Turner's seminal exposition of SIT. Yet the possibility that this might be a solution to *national* status dissatisfaction has not been taken seriously in IR, even among those who deploy other instantiations of social creativity as useful analytical categories. Similarly, while the logic of rejection has been articulated previously, its relation to other logics of identity management has not been clearly established.

In the rest of this article, I further develop the framework and lay out the contours of a research agenda built around it. I pay particular attention to empirically operationalizing the core distinctions highlighted in Figure 1 as well as to proposing working hypotheses about the sources of this variation.

Identification change vs. in-group positional change

As noted earlier, the most fundamental distinction between different kinds of responses to national status dissatisfaction is between responses that shift an individual's identification or affiliation and those that promote a change in the state's status in the world. Empirically distinguishing between these two broad approaches is most easily done in a laboratory or survey setting, by asking individual respondents questions that tap into the degree to which their membership in the national community is central to their self-understanding. Researchers can simultaneously assess the strength of identification with other identity categories using similar survey instruments.[71] Outside of the context of a survey or laboratory experiment, assessing the relative salience of identification change as a response to national status dissatisfaction requires closely examining changes in the ways in which individuals understand and talk about their various group affiliations. For instance, Catalan elites wrote in the wake of the Disaster of 1898 about the 'Semitic', 'Muslim', 'African' origins of the Castilians and Andalucians who dominated Madrid's political institutions; and the satirical magazine 'Cu-cut!' published a series of cartoons mocking the Spanish military – an important national symbol – for incompetence.[72] Both instances represent historical evidence of national dis-identification – discursive efforts to prevent Spain's failure from reflecting negatively on Catalonia.

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[70]Sambanis *et al.* (2015) is an important exception.
[71]For example, see Levendusky (2018).
[72]Balfour (1997, 165–81) and Balcells (1996, 53–54).

What are the conditions or characteristics that influence the relative salience or importance of identification shifts as a response to national status dissatisfaction? While there has been no sustained attention to this question in the context of IR, there are some hints from work in social psychology. First, the prior strength of identification with an in-group – as well as beliefs about the group's ability to effect collective change – is significant. Social psychologists have found that high levels of in-group identification and optimistic beliefs about in-group efficacy drive a tendency toward 'collective action against collective disadvantage'.[73] In other words, individuals who identify strongly with an in-group, and individuals who are confident in the in-group's ability to improve its status are likely to prefer responses that work by changing the in-group's position over responses that work by shifting identification. This implies that strong nationalists, those whose other identifications (ethnic, class, religious, for instance) place them at the center of narratives about national identity, and those optimistic about the state's trajectory and ability to improve its position in the world are *least* likely to respond to national status dissatisfaction via dis-identification.

Differences in national and international social and political contexts may also matter. States with stronger or more institutionalized national identity narratives are likely to experience lower overall levels of dis-identification than are states with weakly institutionalized national identity narratives or states with strong pre-existing subnational identity cleavages. This is part of what made dis-identification such an important response to the erosion of Spain's national status.[74] Put differently, the relative availability and prior strength of different identity categories vary across time and context and influence how and how strongly identification dynamics matter. This is also true of trans- and supra-national identity categories. British elites only had access to the coping strategy of recategorization because a discourse of Anglo-Saxon identity was already salient. Since, for instance, the Anglo-Teuton identity category was less well-established in Great Britain, recategorization was less easily available to Britons dealing with the rise of Germany.[75]

Variation among logics of in-group positional change

The differences described by the three logics of in-group positional change are less fundamental than that laid out above. Yet understanding differences *among* collective logics is no less important. If individuals can engage in or promote various kinds of collective action in the face of collective disadvantage, what explains this variation?

It is useful to begin by examining means of empirically distinguishing between emulation, transformation, and rejection. Again, the objective is not to distinguish between differences in *state behavior*. Rather, the objective is to distinguish between individual orientations toward or preferences about foreign policy. These may in turn influence state behavior through various mechanisms. But the referent object remains at the individual level: how do people differ in the kinds of foreign policies that they promote as responses to dissatisfaction with the state's status?

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[73]Van Zomeren *et al.* (2010, 1056), Ellemers *et al.* (1997), Spears *et al.* (1997), and Doosje *et al.* (2002).
[74]See, for instance, Romero-Salvadó (1996, 121) and Junco (1996, 98).
[75]Vucetic (2011, Kindle locations 831–1063).

This implies that empirically distinguishing between support for emulation, transformation, and rejection involves not just observing the *substance* of policies elites or others promote but also investigating the ways in which they anticipate those approaches addressing national status dissatisfaction. Emulation, for instance, involves identifying states that occupy high-status positions and promoting policies aimed at making one's own state more like them along symbolically significant dimensions of comparison. This can take a wide variety of substantive forms. It describes, for instance, the way that some Spanish elites before and after 1898 thought and talked about institutional reforms that would make Spain look more like France and the UK; it also describes the way that some British and French elites thought and talked about the importance of developing and maintaining nuclear weapons during the early decades of the Cold War.[76]

Promotion of an approach rooted in the logic of transformation, on the other hand, will typically appear as support for policies that aim not at *acquisition* or *performance* but at *renegotiation* or *reinterpretation*. Renegotiation was the essence of the Japanese effort to write a racial equality clause into the League of Nations Charter. Reinterpretation was at the core of calls from some Spanish elites after the 1898 Disaster for Spain to become a 'Quixotic' proponent of traditional, spiritual, Catholic values, rather than to try to emulate the modern great powers. Reinterpretation was also implicated in calls from parts of the British left after the World War II for Great Britain to abandon its role as a 'world power' and instead adopt a role as a 'moral' power working for nuclear disarmament.[77]

Identifying support for policies informed by the logic of rejection involves looking for evidence of a drive to protest some element of the status quo order – not in order to convince others to recognize the state's deserved status but out of an emotional or psychological need for *defiance* and to signal (for both domestic and foreign audiences) the illegitimacy of the status quo. This describes, for instance, the way that Japanese elites on the right thought about Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations – not as a tool to make Japan's ultimate acceptance as a great power more likely, but rather as an expression of Japan's rejection of the interwar order along with everything it implied about Western superiority.[78] This may also be how Vladimir Putin and other militant Russian nationalists understand the annexation of Crimea – as a means of rejecting (or positioning Russia outside the bounds of) the American-dominated post–Cold War legal and normative order. As Evers writes in the course of interpreting recent Russian behavior as an instantiation of rejection, there is some indication that Putin appealed to the Russian 'diaspora's resentment toward the West' in justifying the move and that Russian officials saw the policy as enacting 'a Russian identity that was historically anti-Western'.[79] However, it is also plausible to interpret Russia's reassertion of a sphere of influence as a form of geopolitically competitive emulation, based on an understanding that 'great powers' are distinguishable from other states by their

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[76]On the symbolic significance of nuclear weapons for the British, see McCourt (2014, Ch. 3) and for the French see Sagan (1996); on emulation as a response to decline among some Spanish elites, see Rawlings (2012, 92–93) and Balfour (1997, 70).

[77]On Britain, see Burkett (2013), especially Ch. 1; on Spain, see Arredondo (2005), Balfour (1997, 89–90) and Balfour (1996, 115).

[78]Ward (2017b, Ch. 4).

[79]Evers (2017, 790).

dominance over weaker neighbors.[80] Disentangling these two motives from one another would require more closely examining evidence related to the way that various elites thought, wrote, and spoke about how intervention and annexation addressed their dissatisfaction with Russia's status.

What characteristics and contexts drive individuals to support these different approaches to collectively addressing status dissatisfaction? To date, the only answers to this question involve perceptions of the international environment. Larson and Shevchenko argue that preferences for different approaches to status dissatisfaction depend on beliefs about the 'permeability', 'legitimacy', and 'stability' of the international status hierarchy. Permeability (the perception that elite clubs are open to ambitious states) drives support for Larson and Shevchenko's version of mobility – a non-conflictual form of emulation. Perceptions of impermeability lead to support for their version of social competition. Perceptions of a legitimate or stable hierarchy lead to support for social creativity.[81] Along similar lines, I have previously shown that perceptions of status 'immobility' – an unjust and apparently impenetrable obstacle to status advancement – produce psychological and political incentives for elites to support policies aimed at rejection.[82]

These sorts of factors are indeed significant. But perceptions of the international environment do not exhaust potential explanations for variation in preferences for the collective management of national status dissatisfaction. Personality characteristics may also matter. Individuals differ in the value that they place on in-group status. Social dominance orientation (SDO), for instance, is a personality characteristic capturing an individual's valuation of in-group dominance and hierarchy. Individuals with high levels of SDO strongly value in-group status.[83] Similarly, Federico and Zavala argue that 'collective narcissism' – 'an inflated, unrealistic view of the national group's greatness contingent on external recognition' – also drives concerns about national status.[84]

These characteristics may influence the kinds of responses to national status dissatisfaction that individuals promote. The key to understanding how is to note that collective approaches vary in terms of how vigorously they defend a status claim. The logic of emulation is premised on the notion that the state is capable of achieving or maintaining higher status by acquiring or competently performing the necessary characteristics or practices. It is fundamentally optimistic about the state's ability to successfully compete for symbolically significant attributes and secure recognition. Rejection is, on the other hand, fundamentally *pessimistic* but still rooted in a full-throated defense of the validity and justice of the state's status ambitions. Both logics are likely to be more appealing than approaches based on a logic of transformation to individuals who highly value national status. Approaches rooted in transformation implicitly acknowledge that the state is poorly suited to excel within some significant status community. This is most obvious in the case of downward adjustment, which implies a resignation to living with lower national status. But promoting creativity also implicitly recognizes that the state is likely incapable of advancing along existing status ladders, which is why the latter have to

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[80]See, for instance, Bull (1977, 207, 212), Simpson (2004, 68–71), and Suzuki (2008, 47).
[81]Larson and Shevchenko (2010, 2014).
[82]Ward (2013, 2017b).
[83]Renshon (2017, 98–100) and Sidanius and Pratto (1999).
[84]Federico and Zavala (2018).

be renegotiated in some manner. While both forms of transformation may ultimately alleviate national status dissatisfaction, they may be less attractive the more an individual values status.

An individual's domestic political position may influence her preferences related to addressing national status dissatisfaction for similar reasons. Elites who hold power may be particularly averse to approaches based on transformation, precisely because promoting these kinds of changes and reinterpretations implies acknowledging a national deficiency. Elites in opposition, on the other hand, may be particularly prone to supporting approaches based on transformative logics *unless* and *until* they take power. For example, during the 1950s significant parts of the opposition British Labour Party promoted a downward adjustment in Great Britain's role in the world. This involved, in particular, disavowing the symbolic significance of maintaining an 'independent' nuclear deterrent and working toward nuclear disarmament as a way of becoming a 'moral' superpower.[85] But once back in power beginning in 1964, Labour's apparent willingness to transform Great Britain's role in the world along these lines weakened significantly.[86]

Other kinds of political objectives likely also matter. Elites and other domestic political actors rarely *only* care about national status. They have other interests that might involve, for instance, promoting change in domestic or international political and social institutions. These interests may be easier to square with some kinds of approaches to national status dissatisfaction than with others. For instance, liberal reformers in 19th century Spain promoted emulative responses to eroding national status in part because remaking Spanish institutions to look more like British or French institutions was consistent with their ideological commitments.[87] Similarly, parts of the post–World War II British left (like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) drew on a version of the logic of transformation to argue that London should remake its role in the world to focus on becoming a 'moral' superpower because they were ideologically committed to the policies that shift would facilitate.[88]

Summary

It is worth exploring, by way of summary, how we might deploy the framework developed in this article in order to explain variation in state behavior. Existing work models states as unitary actors and appeals to variables capturing characteristics of the international environment to explain strategic choices. The framework developed above suggests that we gain significant explanatory leverage by acknowledging that different kinds of individuals positioned differently within the political and social architecture of the state are likely to respond in systematically different ways to national status dissatisfaction. This implies that understanding how status dynamics influence state behavior must involve recovering and explaining these heterogeneous preferences and tracing their influence on foreign policy.

In some cases, this might involve nothing more than investigating why different leaders respond differently to perceived national status deficits. But it may also

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[85]Vickers (2011, Ch. 2).
[86]Burkett (2013, 31) and Vickers (2011, 72–73).
[87]Rawlings (2012, 92–93) and Balfour (1997, 70).
[88]Burkett (2013).

require understanding the preferences of different elements of governing coalitions, elements of different domestic audiences, or elites occupying influential positions in the government. And understanding how status dynamics influence *shifts* in foreign policy is likely to require interrogating the ways in which status anxiety and domestic political competition interact.

Consider, for example, the role of anxiety about American status in recent US foreign policy and politics. Accounts based on the character of the international environment (the permeability of elite clubs, for instance) have little to say about any relationship between status concerns and shifts in the US' behavior abroad. After all, Washington sits atop an international order that it constructed after the World War II and then consolidated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States is surely experiencing some degree of relative decline, but it remains preponderant and well positioned at the center of a network of prestige- and influence-enhancing institutions – in short, it is still the global top dog.[89]

Yet status anxiety has undoubtedly inflected American politics and influenced American foreign policy in recent years.[90] During the 2016 presidential campaign, one of Donald Trump's most consistent messages was that the US' status in the world was at risk, in part because the 'liberal international order' unfairly tied Washington's hands in ways that prevented Americans from enjoying the full benefits of their 'greatness'.[91] Since becoming president, Trump has put this drive into effect by moving to dismantle or weaken central elements of global order.

The framework developed above renders this puzzling turn in American foreign policy legible, though not completely explicable. Trump's approach to international order is informed by a variant of the logic of rejection. The institutions of the liberal order appear, from this perspective, as an impediment to the achievement or maintenance of proper American status. They thus become the targets of policies aimed at protest and defiance that express frustration and resentment (which may be simultaneously psychologically satisfying and political useful) and also undermine their legitimacy.

Moreover, personal characteristics and political dynamics may help explain how and why this particular response to anxiety about American status emerged where and when it did. For one thing, Trump clearly strongly values in-group dominance and hierarchy. He would likely score high on a test of SDO. Moreover, Federico and Zavala argue that his campaign rhetoric strongly reflected collective narcissism. Together these factors may help account for Trump's own consistently expressed concerns about the US' position in the world (going back all the way to the 1980s), his choice of political messaging, and the resonance of that message with a sizeable portion of the American right (among whom threats to national status may be particularly salient).[92]

Trump also ran as a political outsider and attached himself to the ideological far right. That position incentivized a focus on highlighting the erosion of national status that previous administrations had allegedly presided over and promoting a message that emphasized the need for change. Yet the high value that Trump and his base place on national status would have made transformative logics relatively

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[89]Brooks and Wohlforth (2016).

[90]On Donald Trump's obsession with status and its influence on US foreign policy, see Wolf (2017).

[91]For an overview of Trump's skepticism of the liberal international order, see Stokes (2018).

[92]Federico and Zavala (2018).

unappealing. This left rejection as the most dramatic alternative to a status quo policy aimed at simply maintaining the US' advantaged position at the top of the existing status ladders. It also meant that Trump's policy orientation was consistent with the skepticism of the institutions of liberal international order that was already rampant in parts of the right for reasons independent of anxiety about national status.[93]

While important questions remain about the role of status anxiety in contemporary American politics and foreign policy, these questions are largely invisible or inconceivable from the perspectives of dominant frameworks that anthropomorphize states and build mostly structural accounts of how status dynamics influence international relations. By contrast, the more flexible framework developed in this article points toward a productive means of making sense of how status dissatisfaction helped produce the new American orientation toward the world and toward a set of working hypotheses that might help us understand this important shift's trajectory.

Conclusion

Research on the role of status dynamics in world politics has developed rapidly over the past two decades. However, it remains limited in ways that are highlighted by recent developments in the United States and elsewhere. Predominant approaches to theorizing the role of status in IR scale up insights from social psychology and cognate fields and use these to develop accounts of unitary or anthropomorphized states reacting to variation in the international environments that they confront as they seek to improve their positions in the world.

While this approach has been productive, it has also contributed to important problems that hamper our understanding of the role that concerns about national status plays in politics and foreign policy. I have argued above that reframing the question from one about variation in state behavior to one about variation in *individual* responses to perceptions of national status is a useful first step in addressing these problems and advancing our understanding of how status dynamics influence international politics. The shift away from anthropomorphic or unitary actor models of status seeking has three important benefits: first, it obviates or minimizes the need to transform and sometimes mutate the psychological and social psychological insights that form the foundation of most work on status in IR; second, it creates an opening for individual psychological differences and domestic politics to play a more important role in accounts of how status dynamics influence international politics and foreign policy; third, it renders visible forms of variation that are invisible or at least not amenable to analysis from the perspectives of the approaches that currently dominate the field.

These are important advances for theory development. A research agenda built on a framework like the one developed in this article could subsume existing insights about national status seeking while better specifying these claims' scope conditions; it would also facilitate more productive investigation into the sources of variation in the ways that national status concerns influence state behavior; and, perhaps most importantly, it might lead to greater attention to the link between

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[93]See Halper and Clarke (2004) for an overview.

status dynamics and domestic politics – both as a moderator and as a dependent variable.

Analytical pathways unlocked by the framework developed in this article also promise to be valuable for understanding contemporary international politics. For years, scholars have looked to China, Russia, Brazil, and India as examples of status-obsessed rising (or reemerging) powers whose strategic choices needed to be mapped out and explained. This remains true but incomplete. Status concerns matter in a much broader range of contexts – and influence a much larger range of outcomes – than existing frameworks are capable of grasping. A more flexible approach – like the one proposed above – promises a more fruitful foundation for deciphering how status works in world politics.

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